Tonight to Bethlehem

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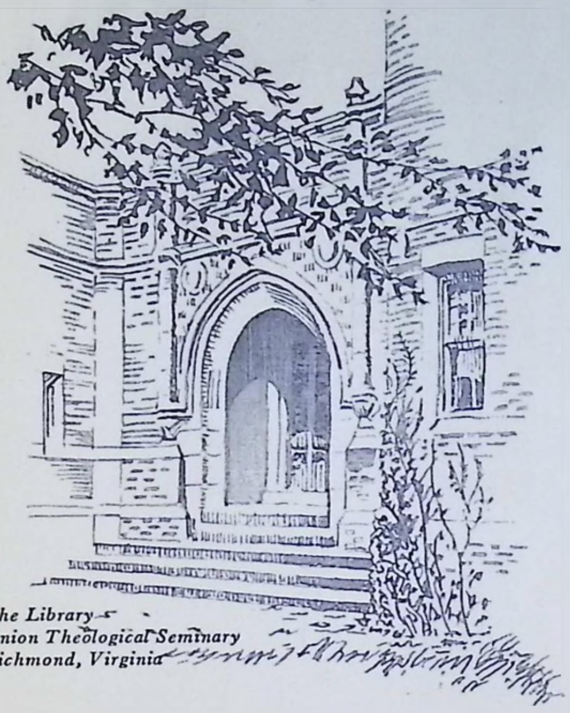

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Tonight to Bethlehem

A Christmas Pilgrimage

MONTREAT, N. C., 1946

Tonight to Bethlehem

London

Restive rides my boat at anchor,
Set to bear me far away
To the sturdy shores of England
And a festive Christmas day,
To the hallowed heart of London
Where the peal of organ rolls
Tidings of the Incarnation
O'er ten thousand waiting souls.

But, with thoughts afar from England,
In which London has grown dim,
I'll search out another country
There to sing my Christmas hymn;
In a spot remote from England
I shall spend this Christmas morn,
'Mid the uplands of Judea
Where the Son of God was born.

Paris

All the lamps are lit in Paris —
Boulevards ablaze with light!
There's a Christmas call to Paris
Mingled with the chill of night.
Worshippers, in adoration,
Bow at each inviting fane,
In that center of enchantment
By the soundings of the Seine.

But I'll dream no more of Paris,
For the shadows beckon me
To a land removed from Paris
By the width of wintry sea,

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Where, perchance, unlettered shepherds,
Hard by David's boyhood town,
Watch their flocks in fields familiar
'Neath the sweep of Northern Crown.

Rome

The chimes will ring tonight in ancient Rome,
As vested choirs chant out their twilight psalm
For pilgrims who have journeyed far from home
To that metrop'lis by the Tiber's flood.

Yet cloistered in the clasp of Judah's hills
A village lies, unreckoned by the world,
Where naught of mortal might majestic thrills,
But some soft spirit call compels
My heart to turn toward storied Bethlehem.

Bethlehem

And so, by trails traversing half the earth,
To Bethlehem, Ephratah, let us go
Along the coursings of that timeless path
Which winds through dark into a manger's glow.

It may be then some splendrous star shall burst
Across the heav'ns to mark our gladsome way,
As angels serenade the frosty night
In blessed strain of Messianic lay;

Since those intent upon the quest of Christ,
With all of heart and soul and strength and mind,
Cannot return unlade at eventide;
For He has said that they who seek shall find.

Thomas H Spence

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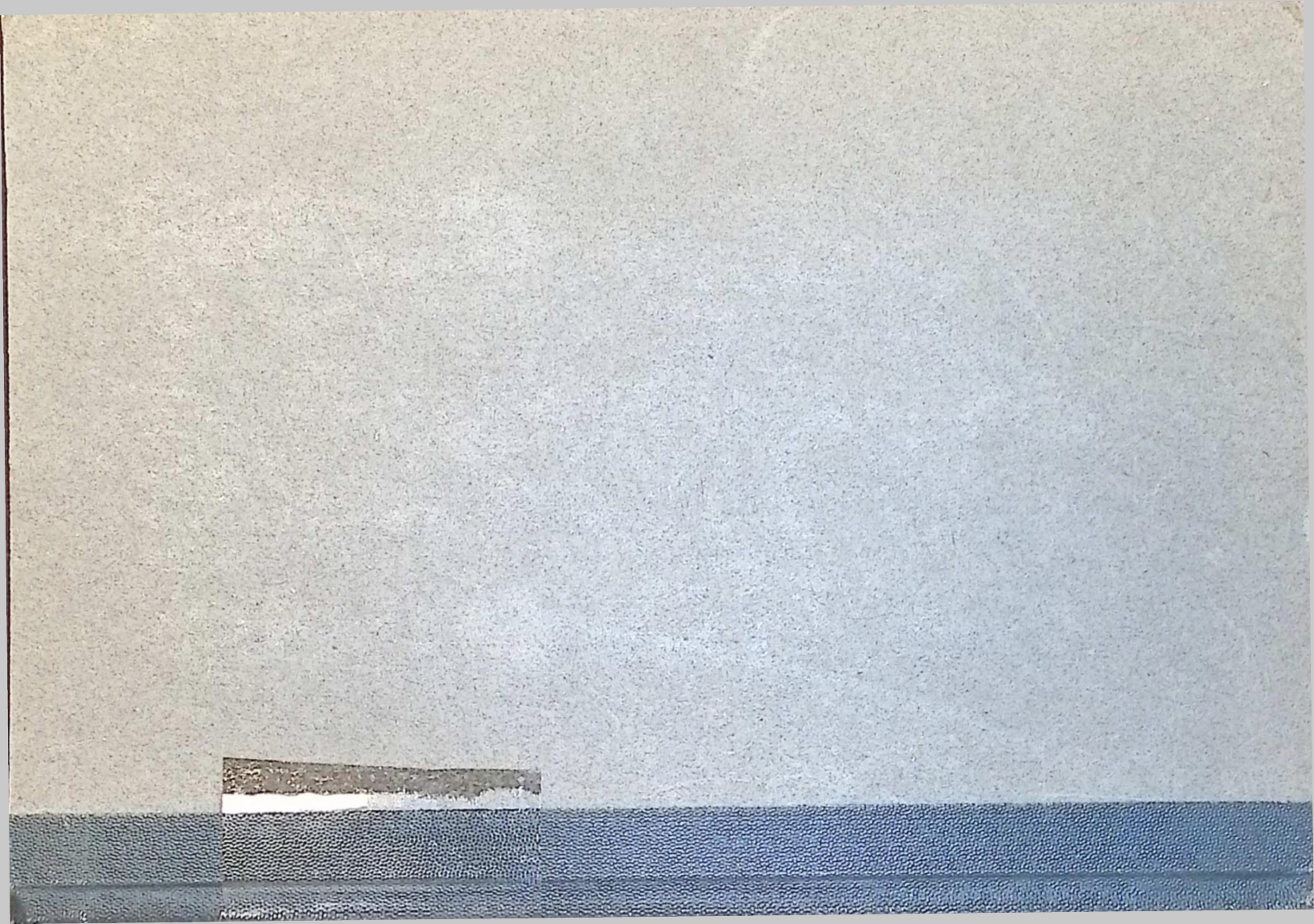
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